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The two influences that initiated experimentation with the nongraded school were the Quincy Grammar School of Boston in 1848 and concern for individual differences. Discussed in this report was the nongraded type of school organization that allowed a flexible situation and a permissive climate in which teachers could adjust their programs in quantity, rate, depth, and emphasis to deal with the range of individual differences before them.

The operation of most nongraded elementary schools used the organization of two first-grade rooms, two second-grade rooms, and two third-grade rooms, with six teachers. The children would remain in their room with the same group for a period of two or three years, depending upon the basic pattern of the administrative structure.

A description of one nongraded school was the Middletown High School in Middletown, Rhode Island. Here, no one failed, because each pupil was permitted and encouraged to learn at his own pace. The content of the curriculum in each of the subject fields had been organized into sequential steps. Each pupil began a semester at the point he had reached in the curriculum sequence during the previous semester. The pupil was evaluated separately in terms of quality and quantity of learning; how much he had learned and how well he had learned it were important.

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS SECTION

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NONGRADED SCHOOLS

by

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Preface

In mounting force, on educational fronts from coast to coast, in professional circles and literature, in public awareness, a new approach to school organization -- nongradedness -- suggests that our schools may be entering an era of extensive organizational change.

While innovation and experimentation with school organization are far from new in this country, the present drive towards nongradedness takes on dimensions of greater seriousness and deeper significance than previous efforts for improvement. The contemporary setting with its flavor of need, urgency, and dissatisfaction is attributable to the climate of change -- cultural, social, technological, economic, and international -- which pervades all aspects of human enterprise today. A growing body of knowledge from the behavioral sciences, for example, has contributed materially to increased understanding of what is involved in helping students achieve their best. Just as many time-honored and established ways of doing things have been challenged by the world setting of today -- school organization is being critically scrutinized.

In reflecting the times and in reporting change, this Education Brief analyzes contributing factors, trends, growth, problems, and the rationale of the nongraded school.

Causal Factors

Experimentation with the nongraded school has grown from two basic influences: the graded school pattern as created by the

Quincy Grammar School of Boston in 1848; and the axiomatic circumstance of individual differences, a condition long recognized but one which now takes on deeper meaning and significance in a changing world.

Both of these elements have combined to give impetus to a movement toward improvement in school organization. The former has contributed through its unrealistic and impersonalized setting for a free, public, universal program of education of all the children of all the people, essential in a democracy. The latter has contributed as, increasingly in these days of heightened demands and pressures on our schools, we have come to a reawakening of the importance of providing for the range of human differences in our educational offerings and opportunities. These two elements have aided in building an understanding that improvement in school organization is imperative in our drive toward quality education for our boys and girls.

The Graded School

When James Philbrick set up the Quincy Grammar School he was striving to improve the operational structure of his school, as well as to facilitate instruction. Like all other school administrators before and since, he was faced with the necessity for creating some manner of administrative framework to provide for expeditious handling of large numbers of children and staff. He logically developed a procedure which enabled him to categorize children for accountability purposes. Thus, basing his rationale on the persuasive logic of chronological age, he formulated a policy whereby children were classified primarily on the number of years in which they had been enrolled in the school. From a point of view of administrative expediency, his was a highly defensible, effective, and successful technique. Since the simple index to a child's history in the school is a byproduct of his age at time of admission, what could be more efficient than to label him in this manner? Basic to this reasoning was the assumption that, since all or most pupils in a grade were on the same accomplishment level, this plan would assure more effective instruction.

A fifth grader, therefore, according to this reasoning, is a child who is in his fifth year in school. Presumably, likewise, he has progressed at a fixed and prescribed rate of subject matter accomplishment during each of his previous years. It is assumed that he has been able to learn and to achieve at a predictable and measurable degree of exactitude. It is further assumed that this level of progress is constant within himself and that he has made comparable progress in each of the subject areas. It does not recognize, for example, that this fifth-grade child may be reading at an eighth-grade level -- or a second, while at the same time be at a fourth-grade level -- or a seventh -- in arithmetic. Discontent with the graded structure began

when failing students began "piling up" in various classrooms, which led in turn to a wide variance of ages within the groups. Pupils who did not meet the achievement standard set for each grade had no alternative other than to repeat that year's work. Herein were planted seeds of continuing discontent with the graded school -- seeds which have come to flower 115 years later.

It is doubtful that Philbrick, in creating the pattern of the graded school, was aware that he was setting a style of school organization which was to stand for over a century, for it remains true today that almost universally the graded school concept prevails.

To assess effects of the graded school and also Philbrick's contribution to school administration, a review of the role of school organization is needed. Restraint against leveling harsh judgment is suggested, for actually the graded school has become a notable and successful contribution to one facet of school organization. Errors and abuses have crept in not because of faulty initial planning but because of a distortion of the relative roles and purposes of school organization and the inability to devise ways of meeting individual differences.

Role of structure in school organization.--Two different types of structure -- operational and instructional -- are essential in any school. Although ostensibly separate and independent, they are veritably dependent and interrelated.

Certain measures of organized procedures and systematized order are both warranted and inevitable in the operational structure in a school. It was toward this problem that procedures in the Quincy Grammar School were directed. The school administrator needed a structure to resolve the daily problems of routine and of the multiplicity of numbers.

The failure of this plan to relate satisfactorily to the instructional program has caused much criticism and dissatisfaction.

No one need be reminded that schools were created and exist primarily for purposes of instruction, thus necessitating instructional structure as well. Within this framework all matters relating to the teaching-learning function are developed. Here determinations of staff utilization, subject matter organization, teaching methods, curricular directions, uses of materials, grouping policies, and all facets of teaching and of learning are resolved. Clearly the nature of instruction is affected by the type of operational structure of the school; however, at the same time, instruction is the infinitely more important component in school organization.

It is mandatory, therefore, to keep constantly and clearly in mind that we do have these two separate though related structures -- operational and instructional -- within a school. The operational base is important since it is an essential element in all human enterprise; but, at best, it is hardly a primary goal in itself. Its worth and its justification lie in direct ratio to the degree to which it supports, creates, and encourages the most effective instructional program possible. Of itself operational structure is not a high objective. Schools must not be weighed and assessed on their smoothness of systematized and routinized efficiency. The merit and worth of a school lie not in the central administrative office but in numerous classrooms where the teaching and the learning take place. The mark of distinction or achievement of a school is found in the extent to which it succeeds in instruction. Thus we are reminded that instructional structure is all-important, when viewed in the context of school purpose, and must not be relegated to a level subordinate to operational structure.

Far too frequently through the years, this is exactly what has been happening, through a distortion of the concept of the graded school. Conceived as a purely administrative device, to aid in school operation, it has been trapped into becoming an end in itself, limiting rather than abetting instructional programs and procedures. As B. Frank Brown has said: "Grades are an administration device that enables school executives to catalogue pupils for custodial purposes and then forget them for a year.... The grade, an educational bellwether for centuries, is a trapping of the outworn past.... The idea that all tenth-grade students are the same and should read the same books and study the same materials is educational nonsense.... Nongrading is highly desirable for bright students, and for dull ones, it is essential. We should not educate them together merely because they were born in the same 365-day period.... Schools have been wrongheaded in their concentration on motivation toward textbooks and assignments that are often dull." (3)*

Individual differences.--The other factor which has given impetus to the movement towards nongraded schools is a reexamination of individual differences. Because of the inexorable laws of human distribution, our children in schools today, as always, represent and present a range of human variability -- from those who are exceptionally endowed with brainpower and potential to others who are extremely limited in their capacity to learn and to do. For example, in this spread, for every child who has an IQ of 121 there is an opposite number with an IQ of 79. When we are reminded that our democracy is committed to equivalent educational opportunity for all (which is not to be misinterpreted as identical education) and that no child has anything to say about what he brings into the world with him, we are impressed with the realization that our programs of education must be realistically attuned to these human differences.

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* Numbers in parentheses are keyed to references at the end of this Brief.

Furthermore, the increased demands of the times and the changing nature of the world situation heighten the need for our schools to provide programs of education which will challenge each child to maximum capability. If, as Charles E. Silberman has stated in his Fortune Magazine article "The Remaking of American Education," (26) the societal mandate to our schools now becomes that of "developing masses of intellectuals," then clearly we must do more for our brighter children. It might be argued that, because of an inherent dedication to the doctrine of the common man and a certain national characteristic of sympathetic understanding for the underdog, we have given more attention to the less able and to average students than we have to the more gifted. Now the swing of the international pendulum reveals that no longer can we afford to waste the talent residing in our brighter students. From this realization have come our recent efforts and experimental programs for the development of our more able to heretofore unattained levels of accomplishment. If our Nation is to survive in the face of a vigorous international ideological struggle, it will survive through the minds of its men. The urgency of the times is highlighting the need for change in our schools.

In light of this trend towards more attention for brighter children and a national tendency to polarize many public issues a very particular caution is in order. Education in a democracy is founded on a nonselective base and plans to serve the needs of brighter children should not be made at the expense of the less able. Certainly schools must continue to reflect the same degree of concern for those children as has been done in the past. To ignore the less endowed could prove to be a costly and disastrous national reversal.

Anything short of a balance of educational opportunity and provision for all children would certainly jeopardize fundamental values and commitments which have led this country to its position of world prominence. The underlying problem is summed up in this passage from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund report The Pursuit of Excellence: "Not only must our educators handle a huge increase in the number of students, they must offer higher quality in education. From time to time one still hears arguments over quantity versus quality education. Behind such arguments is the assumption that a society can choose to educate a few people exceedingly well or to educate a great number of people somewhat less well, but that it cannot do both. But a modern society such as ours cannot choose to do one or the other. It has no choice but to do both. Our kind of society calls for the maximum development of individual potentialities at all levels." (23)

Therefore, the central theme underlying the trend towards nongraded school organization is but an honest acknowledgment of the inviolable range of human differences. As has often been said, children -- like fingerprints -- are all different. The literal truth of the matter is that there are no two children alike. The differences and variabilities range over an almost infinite scale: intelligence, potential, physical growth, aptitude, emotions, personalities, rate of growth, rate of learning ability, color of eyes, occupational possibilities, creativeness, sociability, and successes and failures. These are some of the components which go to make up human beings. They are not attributes to be handled coldly and impersonally on computers. A far-sighted and a fore-sighted program of universal education has no choice but to deal with these inexactitudes if it hopes to survive.

Therefore, to establish an arbitrary organizational format of education -- based upon grades and an unrealistic demand that all children proceed together in a measured unit of a school year and assuming that learning comprises discrete elements of fixed dimensions -- denies and refutes the basic condition of human variability. To expect all children to grow at the same rate and for the same distance, within a contained chronological period, is to miss abysmally the very heart and purpose of education. Such a lock-step concept of educational progress reflects a failure to perceive and to apply the lessons of the times as change impinges upon many of our traditional ways of organizing schools, as it is similarly challenging and affecting the entire gamut of human enterprise.

Consequently, the role and contribution of the graded school is seriously open to question in these changing and demanding times for two reasons: first, while the original graded school plan served well as an administrative procedure for operational purposes, it did not serve adequately the instructional program; and, second, newer demands and expectancies of our schools are placing a higher premium on the value of individual differences, thus mandating a greater degree of flexibility and individualization of instruction.

The Nongraded School

In its simplest form a nongraded school is nothing more than the school which has eliminated formal grade barriers. Other terms are being used somewhat interchangeably in the literature these days -- ungraded, continual progress, the primary unit, continuous progress program, multigraded, multi-aged. However from the growing body of material and discussion surrounding this plan, it appears that "nongraded" is favored. Albeit they all carry the same implication: a break from focusing attention on how a child is achieving in comparison with a particular grade level to a newer concept of how he is individually achieving in terms of his ability and his development.

Experimentation with nongradedness has a longer history in the primary grades than other grades. Most of the evidence thus far has been gleaned from experience with the primary grades, the "nongraded primary unit." Although there is a scattering of nongradedness in the middle and intermediate grades, generally very little attempt has been made thus far to project this plan to upper levels. Very recently has come some action toward nongradedness at the secondary school level. There are strong indications to suggest that the movement is growing, at least in an experimental sense, on all school levels.

Many administrative and technical problems are involved in initiating and developing a nongraded program. Readers are referred to the authoritative volume The Nongraded Elementary School (16) by Goodlad and Anderson for a full development of detailed techniques. It is important, however, to be reminded that this plan in essence is an administrative style of organization -- one which removes grade barriers and seeks to provide for continual educational progress and growth for children without artificially imposed ceilings and restrictions. Basically it is not a new method of teaching, nor is it a different way of conducting a classroom. Essentially, it is nothing more than an operational type of structure, as previously discussed; however, it is a proposal which conveys a potential of improved teaching and learning. By removing the shackles of arbitrary limitations on human processes and by making it more realistically possible for teachers to deal with the range of human variability existent in every classroom, the nongraded program seeks to strengthen the quality of education being offered to our boys and girls today. Nongradedness is a serious effort to restore operational structure to proper relative balance with instructional purposes of the school.

Several local communities have developed descriptive materials and guides for parents to aid in understanding both purpose and operation of the nongraded school. For example, from the Tulsa handbook come these passages:

> The nongraded primary school consists of what is usually called the first three grades of school. The usual grade labels have been removed and the primary years are considered as a block of time during which specified learning objectives should be accomplished. This organization is occasionally referred to as the ungraded or nongraded primary. It is an organization which is designed to help secure continuous progress and growth for each child. It is not a method of teaching or a radical departure from tested procedures employed by good teachers everywhere.

> The organization of the nongraded primary school is designed to insure that arbitrary ceilings are not placed on the achievement of pupils who are capable of advancing at a rapid rate. At the same time, this organization helps to prevent placing unreasonable pressure to achieve on those pupils who for a variety of reasons must move more slowly. The flexibility of this organization emphasizes the importance of individualizing instruction in terms of individual interests and abilities, and of providing all pupils with opportunities to achieve success in the program of the primary school. A child may spend a fourth year in the primary school, if this is required, without a stigma attached to failure and the problems associated with repeating part of a grade. (28)

In conceptual philosophy at least, the nongraded type of organization seeks to create a flexible situation and a permissive climate in which teachers can adjust their programs -- quantity, rate, depth, and emphasis -- to move in response to the range of individual differences which confront them. In this sense it may be in closer harmony with the desires and beliefs of teachers who have felt impeded and restricted by the mechanical unrealism of the graded school and by inhibitions of their efforts toward creative teaching.

Growth of the movement.--In historical perspective the nongraded school is anything but a totally new concept. As a matter of fact, it embraces some of the virtues and merits of the hallowed one-room rural school. In such a school, with its cross-section of ages and grades, the teacher had an excellent opportunity to develop a highly flexible, fluid style of operation in order to serve the wide range. Even today there are those who maintain that the good one-teacher school was a high water mark in American education.

In modern setting the first formally recorded program of nongrading in the primary grades with an unbroken record is credited to Milwaukee in 1942. A second landmark was the adoption of the program in Appleton, Wisconsin, in 1947. Since then the movement has spread slowly though steadily. At the present time the trend is appreciably accelerated. The increase is so rapid that reliable figures are no longer available.

However, we do have some estimates of growth. John I. Goodlad estimated that, while in 1957-1958 there may have been 40 to 50 communities so involved, by 1961, there were as many as 500. (16)

In a 1958-1959 survey the author found that 18 percent of the urban areas in the United States indicated some degree of involvement with nongraded primary units. (7) Miley E. Downs in 1960 suggested that the movement was spreading widely. (10) At the present time reports to the Office of Education suggest a rapidly mounting trend toward nongradedness at the elementary school level, particularly in the primary grades, and also some slight increase at the secondary school level.

The Nongraded Elementary School in Operation

At the elementary school level a variety of patterns for grouping grades is practiced. Since the plan has been prevalent at the primary grade level, our most reliable data are often from these sources. The author found that the most common pattern, as reported by 40 percent of the communities adopting the nongraded primary unit, bracketed grades one, two, and three together in one block. Another 34 percent reported they encompassed the kindergarten together with grades one, two, and three in their primary unit. Still another 16.1 percent indicated their primary unit comprised grades one and two. (7) No appreciable evidence is available thus far to suggest an optimum arrangement. These determinations are more properly made on the basis of local factors and circumstances.

For the middle grades, four, five, and six are commonly clustered into one nongraded entity. However, little progress is discernible at this level thus far.

How does it actually work? What does this kind of school look like? Let us assume a typical six-year elementary school, plus kindergarten. This school has two first-grade rooms, two seconds, and two thirds: six primary grade rooms and teachers. Approximately 60 children enter first grade from kindergarten at the opening of the year.

These 60 children are assigned to the two erstwhile first-grade rooms, only no longer to be labeled "first grades." For identification purposes they may be known as Miss Carter's Primary or Mrs. Anderson's Group. From the very outset the underlying policy for making these assignments is highly important since it pinpoints the need for a reevaluation of grouping procedures and for a clear commitment to an avowed position. For example, they might be assigned by completely randomized heterogeneity; or, on the other hand, certain measures of selection or judgment, such as intelligence quotients, test scores, readiness, or chronological age for purposes of homogeneity might be applied. Actually, within the concept of nongradedness any so-called grouping policy could be pursued without theoretical violence to the operation of the plan. On the other hand, however, serious and sincere commitment to nongradedness invariably reveals the need for a

painstaking review of grouping policies. A clearcut, insightful approach to grouping is essential for success in adopting nongradedness.

In general, these children will remain in this room -- with the same group -- for a period of two or three years, depending upon the basic pattern of the administrative structure. Likewise, in most plans of operation the same teacher will remain with the group for the full period of time, although in some other instances the teacher may not continue with the same group. Apparently most considered judgment favors continuance with the same teacher. Little evidence has been discovered thus far to indicate an optimum alternative.

In this setting the teacher now has at her disposal a larger block of time -- again either two or three years -- in which she is able to guide, lead, and shape the educational progress of her class. She is able to do this rid of the besetting problems of promotion v. nonpromotion at the end of the year; without concern for aspiring to fixed levels of expectancy at chronological check points; and freed of the tensions and pressures inherent in striving to keep the total group at the same constant and steady levels of growth and progress.

In short, through the dissolution of arbitrary restrictions in the form of prejudged and preordained levels and degrees of equalized achievement and time, the teacher now finds herself recognizing, responding, and adjusting to the range of individual differences -- strengths and weaknesses -- resident in her class. She need not feel restricted by the artificialities of administrative control and is released to make a serious approach to the problems and complexities of human variability. In addition, she no longer is forced to look upon learning as a prescribed series of exactitudes, each with its own strict dimensions. Particularly is she no longer restrained by a "ceiling" complex in the form of material on the next higher grade level, a restraint which heretofore had made it impossible for her brighter students to move beyond the confines of the current year's work. Finally, she is now able to adjust the pace of the slower learners without creating frustration and negative attitudes towards education; while, at the same time, she is similarly able to adjust to the pace of more rapid learners so that they may proceed in accordance with their inherent capabilities without creating boredom and negative attitudes. In other words, we may at last be stirring toward a type of instructional organization which is realistically geared to human differences, and not the unwilling victim of operational structure.

It is apparent that even this degree of liberalized structure may still not solve the problem for all youngsters. Inevitably there may be some who may require longer than the basic two (or three) years. There can be little doubt we shall always have such cases. However, with a more elastic period of time in which to absorb some of these

variabilities, during which some erratic individual learning rates may stabilize, it is possible there may be fewer such cases. It should be forthrightly pointed out that this rationale is not intended to result in either a soft pedagogy or an "easy school." Actually the opposite is the goal: That all children will be challenged to a maximum degree, commensurate with ability. Unquestionably there will be some children who will require more time. Certainly such decisions must be faced and made. However, they may become fewer in number. Furthermore, a more extensive body of information and evidence can be brought to bear in the decision-making.

By similar token, of course, it must be recognized that there will always be those children who, through ability and potential, will move rapidly and run beyond even the normal extensions of flexibility and enrichment as implied in the nongraded plan. In certain instances it may not be advisable for some bright students to move too far in advance of their fellows, and opportunities to study problems in depth may suffice. However, it is conceivable that there may be those few children who should be advanced to another basic group prior to the normal expiration of the allotted time period. Here again, perhaps more thoughtful and wiser decisions can be made.

The foregoing is possibly an over-simplication of the way in which a nongraded procedure would actually operate in an elementary school. Such a description can do nothing more than outline the general structure and setting of the plan. As with all types of school structure the essential value and worth lie in the efficacy of the teaching and the learning processes in the classroom. However, because of the flexible nature of this format and because of the releasing of restrictions customarily imposed on teachers in the form of administrative hurdles, the hypothesis proposes that under this plan teachers will become freer to handle human differences in their classrooms.

The Nongraded Secondary School in Operation

Almost without exception the problems encountered in establishing nongradedness as the elementary school level are replicated at the secondary school level. However, in the latter most of the problems and the administrative procedures are greatly intensified and tremendously complicated. Because the essential nature of the secondary school, with its focus on variety and versatility of curriculum and with its multiplicity of purpose, is different from the common-purpose nature of the elementary school, a mere transfer and application of elementary school techniques and devices are not possible.

As previously noted very few actual operating plans have been initiated thus far at the secondary level. One, however, is the Middletown, Rhode Island, Six-Year Secondary School which began in 1961.

In a progress report of the preliminary steps of planning and procedure Sidney P. Rollins, the project director, reports:

> In the Middletown High School no one fails, because each pupil is permitted and encouraged to learn at his own pace. The content of the curriculum in each of the subject fields has been organized into sequential steps. Each new semester each pupil begins at the point he has reached in the curriculum sequence during the previous semester. He does not need to go back to the beginning. Rather, he can begin where he left off during the previous semester.
>
> In order to make possible this flexible pace for each pupil, pupils are evaluated separately in terms of quality of learning and quantity of learning. Because a pupil may progress at his own speed, it is necessary to measure <u>how</u> <u>much</u> he has learned as well as how well he has learned it. These and other ideas have created an atmosphere in the Middletown High School in which the recognition of individual differences results in opportunities to do something about them. (24)

Five steps were incorporated into the initial planning for the Middletown School project:

> I. Development of purposes of the Middletown Six-Year Secondary School; II. Curriculum development which included the establishment of objectives to delineation of content, scope, and sequence for each subject matter area; III. Total program development, including extra-class activity program, guidance program, and library services; IV. Development of administrative policy and function, including class scheduling, patterns of faculty organization, selection of staff and policies and procedures for grouping, grading, reporting to parents, discipline, transportation of pupils, office records, pupil accounting and cafeteria; and V. Final report to the community. (24)

A summary of some initial reactions and judgments of the project appears in a subsequent section of this Brief. The following, however, are listed as "some unsolved problems" after the first year of operation: Integration of subject fields, effective use of large group instruction, need for automatic data processing facilities and assistance, evaluation of pupil achievement, and essential inservice education for staff members. (24)

Again, at best, this citing can be no more than an extremely sketchy report from a community which is making bold strides in experimenting with nongradedness at the secondary school level. Patently, it is impossible to delineate how a "typical" secondary school operates within this setting, for such does not exist. As yet there are very few ground rules, fewer guidelines, and little of a "how-to-do-it" nature. The important point here, it would seem, is that the Middletown Six-Year Secondary School, in addition to several others around the Nation, are sufficiently impressed both by the failure of traditional school structure and by the imperative of providing for individual differences at the secondary school level to set out on what must become a very long road, one which at times may become fraught with tangles and blocks but one which nonetheless suggests a solution to some troubled but forward-looking administrators. A long journey starts with but a single step.

Precautions and Pitfalls

Endless details of planning, of initiation, and of execution are involved in establishing a nongraded school. Several lessons of caution have been gleaned from experience. A number of pitfalls may develop along the way. Likewise a few implications and directions for the future are emerging.

The basic decision.--One of the very first problems that school administrators, attracted to the potentialities of a nongraded plan, may face is whether or not such a shift is warranted. From evidence thus far it is somewhat apparent that two factors have caused local school systems to weigh the merits of the move. In effect these are generally local manifestations of the same basic factors which have given rise to the movement. First is the persistent plague of non-promotion. Time and time again the realization has been confirmed that attempted solutions, in the form of having children "repeat" grades, lead only to additionally unhappy and unsatisfactory results. And yet, this problem will endure just so long as we seek to make all children conform to the artificialities of grade expectancies and normative levels of achievement. The other causal factor, of course, is human variability -- the inexorable natural law now assuming enhanced significance within our educational setting. In various forms and to various degrees these two interrelated situations are leading increasing numbers of school systems toward experimentation with nongraded plans.

An obvious danger in embarking on such an experiment is a compulsive jump in this direction or a hastily thought-through decision to make such a move. Already numbers of communities have had disastrous experiences primarily because they moved too swiftly, if not too impulsively. To say that such steps call for only the most careful, painstaking, thorough, and gradual approaches is trite and yet it must be said -- again and again. The American tendency to succumb to fads, coupled with a frenzied search for quick panaceas to educational ills, has damaged the cause of nongradedness in many places. For any school administrator or school staff to undertake such a venture without careful study, thorough involvement, and modest beginning is unthinkable. In this particular, while it should be perfectly obvious that total staff understanding, participation, and support must be attained, it also should be equally apparent that any campaign which does not similarly solicit community understanding and parental enthusiasm will likewise be doomed to failure.

Educational change.--In his report on educational change in New York, Henry M. Brickell comments on the dynamics of instructional innovation:

> A school, like any other institution, tends to continue doing what it was established to do, holding itself relatively stable and resisting attempts at restructuring. There is a sound reason for this: stability in the institutional structure makes for maximum output of results that structure was designed to produce. Any change in the arrangement of its elements tends to cut down production, at least until new habit patterns are formed.
>
> There are two distinct groups of people who might be expected to influence structural change in the local public schools: the public, which is external to the institution, and the profession, which is internal to it. The process of local educational change is determined by the relationships of these two groups: the public and the board of education as external, the administrators and the teachers as internal.
>
> Calls for distinctly different educational results tend to come from outside the school itself, that is, from the public and the board which represents that public. (1)

Therefore, as with all educational innovation, a studied and thoughtful approach, in concert with widespread participation and acceptance, is an absolute imperative.

Report cards.--Another realm of constant difficulty and distress in nongradedness lies in reporting pupil progress to parents. While parental reporting has always been, and still remains, a source of major difficulty and confusion in parental relations in all types of school situations, with nongraded schools it takes on greater proportions. The wisdom of complete parental understanding at this point of mutual relationship cannot be overestimated. Repeatedly this has been the one single activity which has caused the greatest concern and contributed most to failure on the part of some local programs. We find that, once a school has undertaken to move into nongradedness, sooner or later it has come to grips with the necessity for reviewing and revising its reporting procedures. Because most instruments for reporting pupil progress have been based upon a "graded" rationale, the trauma of change has indeed been deep and disturbing. Therefore, those who show an inclination to adopt the newer pattern of organization should be advised that the process inevitably will involve a searching reappraisal of reporting procedures. Some have observed that the process of reporting pupil progress is the number one "graveyard" for plans of nongradedness.

Vertical articulation.--As local school systems experiment with nongradedness at various levels within their vertical structure -- for example, with primary grades, middle grades, or at the secondary school level -- they face problems of internal articulation. Special problems arise for children who leave a nongraded segment to go on to a traditionally graded block or, conversely, those who come from a graded-school background of experience into a nongraded sequence. It is highly probable that certain steps of orientation and redirection would be advisable for children in either situation. Above all, it would be prudent to anticipate special problems and needs arising from this situation. Unless a school system becomes totally nongraded throughout, these problems of changing over from one type to another, as transfer may affect children, should be planned for.

Reading levels v. grades.--Possibly the gravest concern is the reflection of a continuing need for some sort of "level," couched in terms of subject accomplishment, quantitative expectancy, or both, to replace the "grade." John I. Goodlad comments: "Most existing nongraded schools simply seek differentiated progress for learners through subject-matter sequences which are relatively common for all. This is a step forward, and, with the weight of educational machinery to be moved, perhaps all that can be reasonably expected for the 1960's." (13)

In practice, on the elementary school level, many nongraded schools continue to place high reliance in a series of reading levels. It is far from uncommon in schools which profess to nongradedness to find a system of reading levels at the heart of their plan. The number of levels may vary considerably. For example, one major city employs 11 reading levels, representing separate rungs of the ladder for consecutive mastery during the first 3 years of school. Some cities have seven or eight; others as

many as 17 or 20. To some who seek an understanding of the conceptual philosophy of nongradedness this comes as something of a shock. To remove traditional grade barriers and labels, while at the same time substituting a set of graded reading requirements, hardly seems consonant with the aim of individual progression. As Goodlad further comments: "Some educators have an uneasy feeling after reading about or visiting ungraded schools. What they see in practice doesn't appear to follow from their own interpretations of humanitarian concern with the individual, or from newer insights into individual differences. They perceive in nongraded schools the same narrow concept of school function that prevailed in the graded schools. What they fail to see is that removing grade lines does not necessarily eliminate educational functions served by grades." (13)

In truth, the present movement towards nongradedness -- at least in the sense of theoretical principle and conceptual philosophy -- leaves something to be desired. Certainly it must be acknowledged that despite the contemporary ground-swell very few fully nongraded schools are presently operative. At the same time, when viewed in the long-range perspective of evolutionary development, it may be that progress to date reflects a beginning step along a continuum, with full nongradedness an ultimate and idealistic objective. For professional sensitivities perhaps this early form of development should be viewed as an inevitable transitory phase.

Curricular Implications

The most pervasive message to be drawn from the early experience with nongradedness and its significance for the long range is its curricular implications. The movement brings to light a basic, hidden assumption that learning experiences and substantive fields are taken for granted, requiring only skill in sorting and packaging. At this stage of our educational maturity we are beginning to sense the need for a scholarly delineation and specification of curriculum structure. The need has always been inherent but the graded system has encouraged us to evade the issue. Now, however, with the freeing of shackles and with the lifting of unimaginative mechanisms, we come to the realization that the true test of educational merit lies in its responsiveness to the range of human variability.

To this goal the rationale of nongradedness submits that, through flexibility of operational machinery and individualization of instruction, we shall be in an improved position to offer educational programs which are more viable, in which higher motivation may be stimulated, and in which more realistic accomplishment can be attained. Through this sweeping change we will have placed the relative components of a school in proper perspective and balance to the end that schools become program- rather than operationally oriented. We may now, for the first time,

get at the task of curriculum change and improvement. Attention may now be addressed to the structure of curriculum, as Jerome S. Bruner has urged. The underlying value of curriculum can be reassessed against the dynamism of change and the needs of the times. In other words, while nongradedness, in the sense that it remains a modification in operational procedure, gives some promise for the easing of administrative restrictions, its greatest potential may be realized in the realm of curricular advance.

It suggests an analogy with current efforts in space exploration. Increasingly it becomes apparent that it may be only a question of time -- and of money -- before the world succeeds in landing a man on the moon. However, will this achievement be hailed as the fulfillment of a goal, as an end in itself? Or would it be wiser to view this accomplishment as but a first step into the unknown which lies beyond? We may get the man to the moon, but then the real problems commence. We may succeed in freeing operational structure of our schools, but such action is only a precursor to program improvement. Nongradedness alone, as a device and a technique, could in time become a mere superficiality if it failed to move us toward the improvement of teaching and of learning, the end products of curricular improvement.

Pupil Transfer and Absence

Questions are sometimes raised about the effects of student transiency, school transfer, and extended absence on the operation of a nongraded plan. Where there is a high degree of pupil mobility, can the plan be successfully applied?

In actual practice, because of the individually paced progress of students and the flexible nature of scheduling and programing, a pupil may enter or resume at any time and take up his work at his own point of progress. A youngster transferring in from another school would be assigned to a group or room on the basis of the usual factors of age, past record, and available information. However, the teacher now would have greater latitude in adjusting his school program to what her extended analysis of his skills and accomplishments reveal. Similarly, and notably in secondary schools, a student who has fallen far behind -- either through absence or lack of diligent application -- no longer will experience the futility and frustration of going through the lost motions of riding out the close of a school year in the knowledge that he has already "failed" the course and will be required to start anew next year.

The "lame duck" concept no longer will plague or defeat these youngsters, for, in the essential and basic spirit of the plan, each child will resume the ensuing year at the point which he left off the prior year. Children entering the school from outside the system will be assessed at their point of current progress, and the program will be

adjusted both to their current level and their rate of progress. No longer will children be evaluated against the fixations and rigidities of the preplanned program of prescribed levels and expectancies. Rather, through flexible procedures and humanistic approaches, the program can be tailored to their individual natures and capabilities.

Record Keeping

To make this plan work it is readily apparent that improved methods of record keeping and of progress reporting for teachers -- as well as for parents -- are an inescapable need. With an underlying thread of individually oriented programs of education, and yet with the teacher still handling and being responsible for a regular classroom full of youngsters, the burden upon her to evolve methods of setting down evidences of growth and progress for each child -- as well as projecting future directions and needs -- becomes increasingly difficult, burdensome, and in fact, sometimes virtually impossible. School systems which have experimented thus far with the movement report the need for improving and refining cumulative record procedures. Some have developed extensive forms and processes by means of which a comprehensive educational history of the child is constructed. However, traditional cumulative record procedures, even though highly developed, may not completely serve this newer need. More immediate, accessible, flexible, and usable techniques are required. Here the emphasis must be on immediacy of use and application. In some schools these are called "individual skill cards." It is quite possible that, in due time, developments in electronic data processing procedures may come to the rescue of this critical need.

The Teacher

Comments on the central role of the teacher in the nongraded plan are warranted and necessary. As previously indicated, this style of organization is essentially operational. In and of itself it does not automatically guarantee or even promise improvement in instructional practice. By now the implication should be clear that it <u>may</u> provide a more realistic setting for meeting the changing educational needs and demands of the day. It <u>may</u> provide a more flexible framework and a more conducive climate in which teachers will respond with better teaching and more genuine and sincere attention to individual differences. It <u>may</u> lead to curriculum strengthening and updating. It <u>may</u> result in a more vigorous realization of the ideal of democratic education. It <u>may</u> help to bring about quality education in our country. It <u>may</u> do all these things -- or some of them; or it <u>may not</u>. After all, the philosophic concept of nongradedness is at best nothing more than a catalyst for better schools. It must not be weighed as an end for, at best, it can be no more than a means. Responsibility -- and opportunity -- for effecting improvement rests with teachers themselves.

As has been said since time immemorial about each educational innovation and every dream and every hope for betterment, it literally does "all depend on the teacher." No truer statement could be made about the present state and the future direction of our schools. Nongradedness in the hands of unsympathetic or unperceptive teachers is doomed to miserable failure. Good education, regardless of setting or format -- with or without nongradedness -- becomes the handiwork and product of skilled and creative teachers.

Nongradedness will not make the lot and load of the teacher any lighter. In fact, probably the reverse is true. To aspire to treat each child as a separate challenge and to attempt to move in the direction of individualizing instruction for each of her full classroom of children suggest an enormous undertaking, an almost insuperable responsibility. Yet, it is within this setting that nongradedness will succeed or fail. Let there be no illusions that teaching under a nongraded scheme will become easier or less demanding.

For this reason, the value of soliciting total staff involvement in the planning and preparation for nongradedness takes on heightened importance. Unquestionably there may be some teachers for whom the change will be too difficult and the challenge defeating. The need for some changes in the preservice preparation of teachers for participation in nongraded programs becomes apparent. Certainly the need for inservice work with these teachers also is evident. Undoubtedly some programs of teacher education will require strengthening in such areas as: understanding of individual differences, ways of individualizing instruction, diversified use of materials, and flexibility in planning. Nonetheless, the assumption is offered, on faith and observation, that the majority of teachers seek to do right and well by their students. If nongradedness can shake loose their administrative restrictions, can foster creativity and an experimental spirit, and can establish a climate of excitement of change and challenge, then we may be reaching an important milestone. If it is true that administrative practices and procedures have sometimes affected the quality of teaching, then the degree to which nongradedness will remove these obstacles will be its ultimate measure of worth.

Evaluation and Results

What are the results so far? What evidence is available to demonstrate the efficacy of nongradedness? Nongradedness must be appraised in the context of what it sets out to accomplish. It is necessary to be reminded that essentially this is an operational kind of procedure, one which seeks to establish optimum conditions and influences for improved education.

Two practical considerations are involved at this point. On the one hand, John I. Goodlad has pointed out, "Few, if any, truly nongraded schools exist." (13) We presently are in a preliminary period, a transitional stage, an anticipatory approach to a full-scale trial of nongradedness. Therefore, to press for demonstrable, conclusive evidence is not warranted at this time. Secondly, since the movement is still in its infancy, to hasten normal processes of longitudinal analysis and depth study would also be inadvisable at this stage. Obviously we shall need a great deal of data and evidence, over the passage of time, to aid in developing judgments and conclusions. These again, however, can only be sought in terms of a clear-cut understanding of avowed purposes. Those who may be hoping for spectacular gains in achievement test scores or dramatic indications that our major educational ills have been solved in one full swoop are likely to be disappointed. Several illustrations, however, are available at this early stage.

From the Melbourne, Florida, High School comes this report by B. Frank Brown, principal:

> Take an average high school of 1,200 students, run on a budget well below the national average, with ordinary teachers paid an ordinary salary, and institute an astonishing series of changes. Abandon the old-fashioned grade levels, discard the "archaic" study hall, broaden the curriculum to fully twice the normal scope for a school of this number of students -- and what happens?
>
> Well, here's what happened at Melbourne High School right in the shadow of Cape Canaveral: Students "questing" at their own rate of speed gave Melbourne a third place Westinghouse Talent Search winner in 1961 and a first place winner in 1962.
>
> The percentage of students dropping out of school fell to an astonishingly low 4 percent, the national average being 33 percent.
>
> The number of Melbourne graduates who enrolled in college climbed rapidly from a normal 40 percent to 70 percent. The amazing diversity of new courses -- such as Asian philosophy, electronic engineering, and the Russian and Chinese languages -- stimulated enormous student enthusiasm and nation-wide attention. (4)

In Schools of Tomorrow -- Today, Arthur D. Morse reports on the Appleton, Wisconsin, Continuous Progress Plan in the following manner:

> Under Continuous Progress less than one-half of 1 percent of the students remain an additional year /in the elementary school before entering junior high school/. Before the plan went into effect, Appleton's failure rate under the conventional graded system ranged from about 5 percent in the 1922-35 period to about 2 percent in 1951.
>
> Does this mean that Appleton children are being coddled, that they are not being prepared for the realities of life?
>
> According to the standardized achievement tests they are outperforming their predecessors in graded classes and are exceeding national norms in all subjects.
>
> In 1958 intermediate students made higher scores in the California Achievement Test in reading, arithmetic, and language arts than the Appleton youngsters of 1948. What's more, the level seems to be rising.
>
> In 1956 children in their first year of intermediate school exceeded the national norm in total achievement by six months. In 1957 the same group increased its margin to seven months; and in 1958, before entering junior high school, they were a full year and one month above the national median. (21)

From a perspective of three years in operation, Sidney P. Rollins reports on the Middletown, Rhode Island, High School -- and on the non-graded high school movement in general:

> Here are some of the advantages reported and, to a considerable extent, documented from ungraded schools:
>
> Pupil progress ranges from a year or more ahead of where pupils would be had they attended a graded secondary school to a half year behind the usual achievement at a given grade level.

> Dropout rate (less than 1 percent at Middletown) is drastically lower than the national rate of more than 30 percent.
>
> Pupils recover from extended absences from ungraded schools more quickly and easily than from graded schools.
>
> Pupils stimulate themselves to greater effort -- even in April and May and June, when they normally begin to ease up on studies.
>
> Most parents are pleased -- probably because the pupils appear to be. Pupils seem to appreciate the opportunities for avoiding the boredom and frustration that the ungraded structure can offer. (25)

A study to determine whether there would be a significant gain by primary grade pupils after a variation of the nongraded primary unit had been introduced was conducted by Joseph W. Halliwell.

As background to his investigation, Halliwell reviewed and summarized relatively similar studies by Provus, Morgan and Stucker, Skapski, Ingram, and Hart. In general he observes that the results drawn from these earlier studies are inconclusive; and comments, "This brief review of studies conducted in this area gives some indication of the conflicting evidence." He adds: "This summary of research indicates that the problem of assessing the value of nongraded programs is quite complex and that much more research will be needed before such programs can be evaluated with any degree of validity."

In his own research, comparing the spring achievement test scores of 149 graded and 146 nongraded first-, second-, and third-grade pupils in a school which gradually introduced nongradedness over a 2-year period, his findings, in brief, were: (1) Significant differences at the .01 level of confidence, in favor of the nongraded group were found in word knowledge and in reading comprehension of the first-grade children; (2) with the second-grade group, although the nongraded pupils achieved higher scores in all subjects, only in the area of arithmetic was the difference significant at the .05 level; and (3) with the third grade, higher achievement scores were made by the nongraded group in every subject, but the differences were significant only in arithmetic and in spelling at the .01 level and in arithmetic problem solving at the .05 level of confidence.

Thus Halliwell concludes: "In the light of the findings of this investigation it would seem that a nongraded approach to the teaching of reading and spelling has proved quite effective and is worthy of further investigation." (18)

Robert F. Carbone has conducted an investigation of the relative effectiveness of graded v. nongraded schools through a controlled, matched group experimental design. His leading conclusions, in summary, are:

> (1) There was no evidence to indicate that pupils who had attended these nongraded primary schools achieved at a higher level during their fourth, fifth, or sixth years of school than pupils who had attended these graded schools. On the contrary, the differences were all in favor of the graded pupils; (2) in four out of five mental-health factors there was no significant difference in the adjustment of these graded and nongraded pupils; and (3) teachers in the nongraded schools appeared to operate much the same as teachers in the graded schools.
>
> The implications of these findings are clear. First, it is not realistic to expect improved academic achievement and personal adjustment in pupils merely on the basis of a change in organizational structure. Second, the attainment of high pupil achievement and good mental health is not a unique result of nongrading. The evidence presented here indicates that these goals can also be attained in an elementary school organized under the conventional graded system.
>
> A third extremely important implication is suggested lest readers see this evidence as an indictment of the whole concept of nongrading. It seems clear that if any new form of school organization is to produce the benefits that its advocates envision, it must be accompanied by appropriate adaptations in the instructional practices of teachers. Changes in organizational structure alone are not enough. (5)

Thus, from the Carbone study further support is drawn in substantiation of the persistent theme that the ultimate value and gain of nongradedness must be determined in the classroom. This is in harmony with the tenet offered by John I. Goodlad and Robert H. Anderson that: "The nongraded plan is a system of organization and nothing more." (16)

At this stage of development, with reference to evaluative processes, Goodlad observes:

> Enthusiastic respondents attribute to nongrading a reduction in tensions for slow-learners, a lessening in boredom for the academically talented, and improved classroom behavior. Dissenting parents and teachers are few. It might be concluded that most persons associated with nongraded schools are happier for having them. For a time, at least, until rigorous research designs and studies employing them are available, the promise of nongraded schools will continue to be appraised on the basis of their perceived contribution to human welfare. (13)

Pros and Cons

A review of the literature, visits to and observations of programs in action, conversations with persons engaged in programs, and discussions with leaders of the movement have all contributed to the following statements of the case for and the case against nongradedness. Some of these statements lie in the realm of claim and subjective argument; they are not necessarily valid or conclusive.

For Nongraded Schools

1. Recognition of and provision for individual differences among children.
2. Flexibility in administrative structure.
3. Abolition of artificial barriers of grades and promotion.
4. Respect for the continuity and interrelatedness of learning.
5. Student progress commensurate with ability.
6. Improved mental health for both teachers and students.
7. Stimulation for major curricular revision.
8. Harmony with the educational objectives of a democratic society.

9. Administrative feasibility for all levels and age groups.

10. Schools program-oriented rather than operationally controlled.

Against Nongraded Schools

1. Soft pedagogy, lacking fixed standards and requirements.

2. Impossible burden on teachers.

3. Replacement of grade requirements by reading levels.

4. Lack of pupil progress information to parents.

5. Inadequacy and insufficiency of teacher preparation.

6. Absence of minimal standards and expectancies for all children.

7. Lack of specificity and order in curriculum sequence.

8. "An improved means to an unimproved end" -- Thoreau

9. Uncertainty that improved teaching will result.

10. Widespread misuse and abuse of the terminology of nongradedness.

Resumé

The nongraded school:

1. Is conceived in the democratic setting of equal educational opportunity for all, commensurate with individual needs and abilities.

2. Removes administrative barriers to effective teaching and learning by providing programs attuned to the wide range of human differences and which are not restricted by grades and annual promotions.

3. Has evolved because of the failure of the graded school to respond to the changing needs of the times and because of a renaissance of the conviction that all children must be educated to the extent of their individual potential.

4. Is an innovation in organizational structure of a school; it is not a different way of teaching nor does it change what is taught.

5. May, however, pave the way to more creative and liberalized teaching and to major curricular revisions because it breaks the shackles of administrative control over the instructional program.

6. Exists in very few communities in full philosophic purpose and practical development.

7. Is spreading very rapidly throughout the country in limited form and in transitional stages of development.

8. Is substituting reading levels or other similar achievement measures for grades as it presently is being developed in many places.

9. Requires a long period of careful study and preparation to be successfully introduced into a community, and a thorough involvement of staff, community, parents, and administration in its initiation.

10. Is not a panacea for the quick curing of all educational ills; it runs the risk of becoming victimized by unreasoning popular appeal and American faddism.

11. Must increasingly be accompanied by research programs and investigations which can culminate in valid and reliable measures of its value and contribution.

12. Suggests a potential which could lead to improvement in American schools when intelligently applied and creatively developed.

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

> The facts and theory that suggest the kind of elementary school we advocate are largely a product of the twentieth century. The circumstances that led to the elementary school we would abolish were characteristic of the nineteenth century. We believe that research on human development, learning and curriculum, now available to educators, points to a nongraded type of elementary school organization.
>
> Goodlad and Anderson (16)

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